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A PERSPECTIVE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Over the years, there has been proliferation of rural development strategies aimed at developing the rural areas in Nigeria. These strategies include River Basin Authority (RBDA), National Agricultural Land Development Authority, Agricultural Development Programme, Agricultural and Rural Electrification Scheme, and Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI 1985) among others. Despite the efforts of successive governments in formulating and implementing these policies in order to transform rural areas for a better life, the menace of rural backwardness defied all government efforts of developing the rural areas. The reasons for the failure in these policies were not far from policy inconsistencies and misappropriation of funds. This paper therefore, argues that to achieve rural development objectives, effort should be made to ensure policy continuity and judicious utilization of funds. The objectives of the paper is therefore, to give an overview of the past rural development strategies and the factors that militate against the realization of their objectives. The paper utilizes secondary sources of data and an analytical data analysis method.

Keywords: Rural Development, strategies, ADP, Green Revolution.

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of colonialism in Nigeria the development of the rural areas has generally, being the concern of the various levels of governments. The needs to designate programmes toward developing the rural areas arise from the neglect of the rural areas by various governments' planning strategies in favor of the urban areas. This scenario has led to a distinctive and recognized demarcation between the rural areas and urban cities. In order to correct this mistake and enhance the condition of the rural areas various programmes were initiated and implemented in conjunction with international organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nation (Salisu, 2016).

In the 60s and 70s, most rural development programmes were mainly targeting the rural people through agricultural development programmes. The assumption was that through agricultural development other sectors such as the rural economy, education, health and social aspect might be positively affected. Thus, various agricultural development programmes were initiated and implemented. Some of these are Co-operative Societies, River Basin Development Authorities and Agricultural development Project (ADP) in collaboration with other institutional development agencies.

All these strategies were introduced at various levels of rural development programmes in Nigeria with the aim of accelerating the development of the rural areas. However, despite the execution of the rural development strategies from the 1960s to date, the rural areas still remains backward, which necessitate the examination of these strategies with a view to examine the causes of the problems and proffer solutions

to them. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to make an overview of the rural development strategies in Nigeria by utilizing primary sources of data collection as well as analytical method of data analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural development as a concept varied meaning between scholars and practitioners to the extent that there is no general consensus as to what it actually means. Rural development has been viewed from different perspectives such as agricultural, infrastructural and educational as well. In general, literature on rural development is in abundance. Some of these can be found in the scholarly works of Nchuchuwe (2012), Horlings (2013), Chambers (2014), Dixon (2015), and recently Barlett (2016), who have written extensively on the concept of rural development. What was deduced from their conceptualization was that rural development can be seen as a process whereby government work in close cooperation with the people to improve the economic, social and cultural condition of the rural communities.

According to Abdullahi (2015) rural development involves a broad base mobilization of the people so as to enhance their capacity to cope with daily task of living through transformation of the means of production, especially in technology, which in turns, will improve the material and social life of the majority of the people. Within this context, rural development is therefore concern with reduction of the inequalities in income, employment, access to public goods and services, and the alleviation of poverty in the rural areas (Olawepo, 2012).

However, from the agricultural perspective, which is the predominant approach to rural development, rural development is conceived as a way of improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry in order to create a stronger agricultural and forestry sector concerns with rural extension, and the livelihoods of farmers and their families (Izuchukwu, 2011). Similarly, Gangopadhyay (2014) sees rural development as concern with improving land utilization, agricultural technologies, research and extension, agricultural inputs, access to market and production maximization, pricing policies, subsidies, incentives, credit, and return on investment. However, studies conducted by Akpan (2012), and Kalugina (2014), have differently confirmed that agriculture is by no means the only possible occupation for the rural people. Therefore, it is erroneous to equate agriculture development with rural development. Rural development is wider than mere agricultural development as it implies a broad-based reorganization and mobilization of the masses in order to enhance their capacity to effectively deal with their daily tasks.

Similarly, Lancu (2012) asserts that the ambit of rural development is very wide and includes generation of new employment, more equitable access to arable land, equitable distribution of income, wide spread improvement in health, nutrition and housing, maintenance of law and order, creation of incentives and opportunity for saving, credit and investment. It also involves creating wider opportunities for individuals to realize their full potential through education and sharing in decisions and actions, which affect their lives.

Rather than being an activity Rajamohan (2013), and Nair (2014), have conceived rural development as a process towards improving living standard of the rural poor by eradicating poverty and this does not centre solely on increasing per capital income, but it equally embraces the provision of infrastructural facilities to promote good quality of life.

Basically therefore, rural development as a variant development can be perceived from two perspectives- as a means and as an end. As a means, rural development entails the strategies, mechanism, approach, theory, model or tool which is use to achieve rural development, while as an end, it entails the outcome of the rural development effort which centers on improvement of the living condition of the rural people. Therefore, for any rural development efforts to achieve meaningful result, it must see man as its centre-piece and as a subject of its objective (Salisu, 2016).

Post-Independence Experience in Rural Development

In the 1970s, there was a renewed effort in what was called rural development. The main idea was actually a desperate effort to ensure adequate food supply for the nation, especially for the parasitic urbanites. The efforts really served the needs of the cities through which the best and the choicest food produced were carted away by the middle men who had bought them at ridiculously low prices from the original producers. The policy was in practice exploitative and it impoverished the rural dwellers because the policy was aimed at enhancing of food and crop production only, and not for developing the areas holistically. Billions of Naira has been spent on rural development projects, yet the conditions of the rural inhabitants continued to be

poorer, abject and pitiable or miserable. This is because the projects were not aimed at developing the rural people, and where they happened to contribute to the development, such contributions were secondary and distant. However, Government of various regimes have employed some strategies aimed at developing the rural areas in Nigeria. Some of the tried strategies are:

The River-Basin Development Authority (RBDA 1962)

It was first launched in 1962, expanded in 1976 and further expanded in 1983. However, it was revised and curtailed between 1984 and 1986. The declarative aim of the authority was to make the nation self-sufficient in food production and to uplift the socio-economic standard of the rural dwellers. Accordingly, Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981) reported that the government provides in the Third National Development Plan, a huge sum of money to develop the main rivers of the country to benefit agriculture and rural development. However, the activities of the authority showed that the development philosophy was still the trickle-down approach as rural development was not a serious issue in the objectives of the River-Basin Development Authority. The objectives of this programme include:

- i. To undertake comprehensive development, both surface and underground water resources for multi-purpose use.
- ii. To undertake a scheme for the control of flood, and erosion, and for the water-shed management including afforestation.
- iii. To construct and maintain dams, dykes, wells, bore-holes, irrigations and drainage systems.
- iv. To provide water from reservoir and lakes for irrigation purposes to farmers and to recognize associations, as well as reservoirs for urban water supply scheme.
- v. To control pollution in rivers, lakes, lagoons, and creeks.

The National Accelerated Food Production Project (NAFPP, 1973).

This project was launched in 1973 and it continued until 1976 when it was replaced by the Operation Feed the Nation Programme. It was an impact-making agricultural strategy to increase food production in specific areas and sub-sectors of the agricultural economy. NAFPP relied heavily on the cooperative approach as well as on technical assistance for its success. The scheme was a well-conceived and guided change programme for rural development, especially in the area of food production.

Operation Feed the Nation (1976)

This programme was launched in 1976 by the then Head of State of Nigeria. Lt. Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo. It was designed to awaken the generality of Nigerians on the advantages of the agricultural occupation, especially, those living in the rural areas. The objectives of the Operation Feed the Nation were as follows:

- i. To mobilize the nation towards self-sufficiency and self-reliance in food production.
- ii. To encourage the sector of the community relying heavily on food purchase to grow their own food.
- iii. To encourage general pride in agriculture.
- iv. To encourage balanced nutritional feeding and thereby produce a healthy nation.

The Operation Feed the Nation was not specifically a rural development strategy, but the rural areas benefited through inputs and professional advice. However, Osuntogun and Olufokunbi (1986) observed that the Operation Feed the Nation rather than solving food problems created opportunities for the ruling class to appropriate national funds. They were appointed Board members as well as given fat contracts.

The Agricultural Development Projects (ADP 1975).

The projects commenced in Nigeria in 1975, and it was jointly owned by the World Bank, Federal and State Governments. The ultimate objective of the Agricultural Development Projects system was to raise productivity, increase farm output, income and standard of living of the rural people. The emphasis was on the promotion of small-scale autonomous projects operated by a multi-disciplinary management unit. Using the cooperative approach, they tackled many aspects of agriculture, which includes production, marketing, infrastructure and training. The problem with the Agricultural Development Projects was that it uses a mixture of settlement and big-push approaches, and as such, their heavy capitalization prevented it adoption by government and organizations.

Green Revolution.

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This was a crash agricultural programme launched in 1980 by Alhaji Shehu Shagari's Administration. It was aimed at boosting food production in a bid to provide food to every Nigerian. The objectives of Green Revolution include:

- To make the country self-sufficient in food production within 5 years.
- To return the country to its pre-eminent crop production stage within 7 years.

Unfortunately, it failed because the same government that instituted Green Revolution with the aim of making Nigeria self-sufficient has as at 1985, embarked on a large-scale importation of rice from India and America, and essential food items for survival and sustenance.

Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI 1985)

The directorate was one of the numerous programmes that were instituted by the then President of Nigeria, Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida in 1985. It was a kind of home-grown social dimensions of adjustment project for Nigeria. According to Ekpo and Olaniyi (1995), DFRRI has the following objectives:

- To improve the quality of life and standard of living of the majority of the people in the rural areas by improving greatly the quality, value and nutritional balance of their food intake;
- By raising the quality of rural housing, as well as the general living and working environment in the rural areas;
- By improving the health condition of the rural people, and
- By creating greater opportunities for human development and employment, especially self-employment and invariably enhancing rural income levels;

The Nigeria's DFRRI can be perceived as a kind of integrated rural development strategy. Its activities can be grouped into the following broad areas: Provision of economic and social infrastructures, production of agricultural inputs, development and dissemination of improved technology to enhance agricultural and rural housing and mobilization for mass participation in rural development.

DFRRI developed rural access roads. Government surveys indicated that 60,000km of rural feeder roads were either constructed or rehabilitated under the first phase, which was completed in 1987. In 1990, a total of 30,724.34km of rural feeder roads were completed and accepted as having met the required specifications under the second phase of the project. Another 55,576.24km of rural roads was constructed in 1991. However, in 1992, a total of 85,592.82km of rural feeder roads were completed, inspected and accepted.

Another important infrastructure on which DFRRI's resources were concentrated was rural electrification. The first phase of this project took off in 1987. Two model villages in each local government area of the country were selected for the project so as to serve as reference points in rural development in the country. By 1989, about 142 electricity projects were completed in phase 1. In 1990, 114 communities in 11 states were provided with electricity. In 1991, 325 communities were supplied with electricity, and another 506 communities benefited in 1992. Also, on water supply to rural communities, 4,000 wells/boreholes were reported to have been sunk by 1989. Another 1,291, 11,310 and 18,680 wells and boreholes were sunk in 1990, 1991 and 1992, respectively (Ekpo & Olaniyi, 1995).

The Better Life Programme:

Following the outcome of Beijing Conference of 1985, Chief (Mrs.) Maryam Babangida initiated the Better Life Programme for Rural Women in September 1987. The objectives of the programme, according to Obasi and Oguiche (1995), include:

- to stimulate and motivate rural women towards achieving better living standards, and sensitize the rest of Nigerians to their problems;
- to educate rural women on simple hygiene, family planning, the importance of child-care and increased literacy rates;
- to mobilize women collectively in order to improve their general lot and for them to seek and achieve leadership roles in all spheres of society;
- to raise consciousness about their rights, the availability of opportunities and facilities, their social, political and economic responsibilities;
- to encourage recreation and enrich family life; and
- to inculcate the spirit of self-development particularly in the fields of education, business, the arts, crafts and agriculture.

Belter Life Programme was conceived as a feminist programme focusing on women especially those in rural areas. This programme, like the previous ones, did not achieve any meaningful success as most of the rural women were used as a means by which the urban women enrich themselves from the programme. According to Ariyo (1991), the conclusion reach in most scholarly attempt to evaluate the performance of rural development strategies in Nigeria such as ADP, RBDA, and DFRR in terms of real extent, effectiveness and impact, the size and target population it reached, the level of production attained, and the quantity and quality of the infrastructure developed is that these institution achievement are unimpressive when set against the cost and the projects they executed as their overall achievement. According to him rural development institutions, such as those mentioned above have produced limited result, consequently leading to the past deficiencies, which include proliferation of institutions, lack of capacity building, authoritarianism, institutional duplication, inadequate funding, unjustified public intervention and wrong policy.

3.0 Problems of rural development strategies in Nigeria

The problems that militates against the success of rural development strategies in Nigeria include:

1. Lack local participation- Most of the programmes were planned and executed from the urban without taking into consideration the actual need of the community or the participation of the local people themselves.
2. Policy inconsistency- most of the programmes are crash programmes and none has ever reached to zenith before being nipped in the bud. This constant change and replacement of the same programme with different name tends to hinders realization of strategy objectives, for instance, before Nigerian people could understand what NAFPP was, it has been replaced with OFN, and before Operation Feed the Nation could get underway, it was replace with Green Revolution.
3. Corruption- There is problem of misappropriation of funds that are meant for the rural development programmes, which have result in either abandoning or incompleteness of the programme. On most occasions the man at the top and virtually all the participants in the programme are only interested in what they will gain out of the money, and most often time, money is not released at all, and when released, it comes very late. This hampers the execution or completion of the programme.
4. Absence of Strong institutions- From a development point of view for a strategy to be successful it must has a strong institution that is capable of initiating and executing development plans. A strong and viable bureaucracy is a requirement for attaining any meaningful rural development strategy, while lack of strong institution is the bane of development strategy failure in Nigeria.
5. Rigidity of strategy-Rigidity in development planning strategy is a major bane of Nigerian's planning effort. A development planning strategy is not supposed to be rigid so that it could not accommodate unforeseen circumstances.

Way forward

In order to overcome the problems that militate against the success of rural development strategies in Nigeria, these recommendation could serve as a way forward. These are:

1. local participation- when a strategy is to be formulated and implemented it should involve the local people, those whom the programme is meant for. This will invariably make the people feel a sense of belonging and this will allow them to contribute their quota toward realization of the programme or strategy.
2. Policy consistency-For Nigeria to achieve meaningful rural development strategy objectives, there has to be consistency in the strategy or policy as constant change and replacement of the same programme with different name have tends to hinder policy or strategy realization.
3. Corruption- Corruption in Nigeria has eaten deep into all fabric of the polity; it is only when corruption is arrested that the necessary condition for the realization of rural development objective can be created. It is only when corruption is exterminated that the conducive environment for better sector would emerge, in the sense that, the emerging climate would be one that insists on fiscal discipline and deliverance of service for the general good as the core values of governance.
4. Strengthening of institutional capacity- From a development point of view, for a strategy to be successful, it must have a strong institution that is capable of initiating and executing development plan. The National Planning Office has to be strengthened in order to be able to discharge its responsibility effectively and efficiently through training of personnel.

5. Flexibility-Rural development strategy should be planned in such a way that it takes cognizance of the unforeseen circumstances. If room is given for adjustment this will discourage discarding or replacement of a strategy.
6. Monitoring and Evaluation-In order to achieve policy objective for any kind of project, the agency that is charge with the supervision of the project or policy must have a competent monitoring team to ensure that the project or strategy is progressing according to the plan.
7. Equally important is evaluation of the project or programme this has to do with comparing the objective with the actual work on ground in order to measure the effectiveness or otherwise of the project and to see areas that need adjust or more attention with the view of revising or modifying the project or programme.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, rural development strategies in Nigeria fail because of lack of local participation. Hence, there is need for indigenous people to be part and parcel of any development programme that is meant for the rural people. On corruption the new government seems to be more serious than previous governments in fighting corruption squarely from all corners. According to recent ranking on corruption it was said that corruption has reduced to 30% since the inception of this new administration. Policy somersault had been the bane of development in the country as it led to policy failure. Policy realization is a function of effective monitoring and evaluation to compare the intended goal with the actual goal. In this sense the bureaucracy plays a vital role in achieving policy target. This calls for institutional capacity building in order to achieve rural development strategy objectives.

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